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**Air Traffic Control Initiative  
under the auspices of  
The U.S.-China Defense Conversion Commission**

## **Summary**

Efficient and safe air traffic control is essential to the growth of the aviation system in China and to economic growth itself. Economic growth is dependent upon a transportation system that can quickly and efficiently transport people and goods. In a country the size of China, the development of an air transport system is critical to sustained economic growth.

Therefore, the U.S. Department of Defense proposes that the U.S. and Chinese governments enter into a cooperative effort in the air traffic control sector. The purpose of this initiative would be to:

- Where appropriate promote the use of existing military air traffic control resources to support the development of civil aviation,
- Promote the standardization of the Chinese air traffic control equipment industry so that military and civil air traffic control systems are compatible; and
- Promote increased coordination between military and civil air traffic control authorities in the area of airspace management, the future air navigation system (FANS), and other areas of mutual interest.

## **Background**

Before the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) was established in 1958, the United States had two systems for air traffic operations and air space management -- one run by the U.S. Department of Defense and another operated by the FAA's predecessor agency, the Civil Aeronautics Administration. The Federal Aviation Act of 1958 was passed after several years of national debate that focused on five issues:

- Poor coordination between the two authorities responsible for providing civil and military air traffic operations and airspace management;
- A series of fatal air crashes between civil and military aircraft operating under separate flight rules;
- The cost of providing two completely separate systems for operations and airspace management;
- How to provide for the military's air traffic operations requirements in a system that might be managed by a civil authority; and

- How to provide for significant growth in air traffic operations in a system which was badly constrained by the existence of two separate authorities (civil and military) for air traffic operations, airspace management and equipment design and procurement.

This debate resulted in the 1958 legislation that created the Federal Aviation Agency, a civilian body, which was charged with:

- Controlling the use of the navigable airspace of the U.S.;
- The regulation of both civil and military operations in that airspace; and
- The development and operation of a common system of air traffic control and navigation for both military and civil aircraft.

This legislation poised the United States to take full advantage of a national asset -- its airspace -- to support economic growth while at the same time maintaining its sovereign air defense requirements.

China -- with its 30 percent annual growth in air traffic -- faces air traffic control issues similar to those encountered by the U.S. during its high aviation growth period. The U.S.- China Defense Conversion Commission provides a forum under which the two countries can enter into cooperative efforts in the air traffic arena that would lead to increased coordination between the civil and military air traffic authorities and consistent with the objectives of the Commission, the increased use of air space for civil purposes as appropriate.

Areas of possible cooperation include:

- Where appropriate, cooperation in the identification and use of existing military air traffic control resources to support the development of civil aviation;
- Cooperation to promote the standardization of both civilian and military air traffic control equipment so that the systems can provide for seamless air traffic control between both civil and military controllers; and
- Cooperative efforts leading to increased coordination between military and civil air traffic control authorities in the area of airspace management, the future air navigation system (FANS), and other areas of mutual interest.

The lead organizations for this effort on the U.S. side will be:

U.S. Department of Defense Policy Board on Federal Aviation  
U.S. Federal Aviation Administration  
U.S. industry trade associations as appropriate.